

Reserves vs. Active Duty

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Reserves vs. Active Duty
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INTRODUCTION

"Companies were great, battalions were marginal, and regiments were useless" ¹ observed Lieutenant General Boomer, the MEF Commander during Operation Desert Storm, during his evaluation of the Selected Marine Corps Reserve's (SMCR) performance. Performance issues persist reflecting deficiencies in education and training in the Reserve Officers Corps. However, when active duty officers were integrated into key billets within the SMCR during OIF, reservists' performance improved dramatically. Consequently, to correct deficiencies and to improve force readiness, the Marine Corps must fill SMCR billets in garrison and during activation with active duty Inspector and Instructors (I&I).

BACKGROUND

From 1776 until 1915, reserve Marines had no official status and were "organize[d], arm[ed], uniform[ed], equip[ped] . . . eligible to be called forth by the President of the United States to serve the United States in event of war"² as part of the Naval Militia. The Naval Militia was created by the Secretary of the Navy for "placing the reserves of men, as well as materials, in such a state of training and readiness as to make them available for effective service on 24-hour notice."³

¹ Cancian, Mark Col (USMC), Pg 53.

² McCahill, William Col(USMCR), Pg 3.

³ McCahill, William Col(USMCR), Pg 1.

The Naval Militia eventually became the Naval Reserve Force. On 10 July 1915, the Department of the Navy General Order 153 "created" Marine detachments to protect the Naval Reserve Force; at this time, the Marine detachments did not fall under the Marine Corps' operational control.

The creation of the Naval Reserve Force opened the door for a Marine Corps reserve force. The Commandant of the Marine Corps (CMC), Lieutenant General George Barnett, "[sought] to strengthen the Marine Corps and to create an operative Marine Corps Reserve."⁴ With Congressional approval of the Naval Reserve Force, the Commandant felt he had a chance to establish a Marine reserve force. On 29 August 1916, Congress approved of the increased end strength of personnel in the Marine Corps and the creation of a reserve force.

After the World War I, Congress debated "whether or not the reserves could be made sufficiently useful in time of peace to justify the expenditure of public funds."⁵ Among many and varied reasons for maintaining a reserve force, the primary reason is economics; it cost more money to maintain an all active duty force, then having a smaller active duty force while maintaining a reserve force. However, reserve forces are not as readily available as active forces, nor are they as capable, unit for

⁴ McCahill, William Col(USMCR), Pg 4.

⁵ McCahill, William Col(USMCR), Pg 24.

unit, given the limited training time available.⁶ Over the years, the numbers of reservists in the Marine Corps has fluctuated, increasing during major conflicts and decreasing afterwards. Despite this ebb and flow, the reserve force has continued to follow the mission established by LtGen Barnett in 1916:

A trained force of officers and men available to serve as reinforcement to the Regular Marine Corps in time of War or national emergency. . . ⁷

TRAINING DEFICIENCIES

A significant deficiency in the Marine Corps reserves is its officer training. Reserve officers do not have enough time to get the proper amount of training in order to meet the CMC's mission. The old adage, "You cannot stuff a five pound bag with ten pounds of materials," is a great analogy to the annual training "bag" the reserve officers carry. Since 1916, the SMCR force has attempted to tailor reserve officer training after its active duty counterparts. Reserve officers and active duty officers share the same career paths for the first three to five years: The Basic School, a MOS school, and then three to five years in the Fleet Marine Force. However, once an active duty Marine officer becomes a reserve officer, his amount of time to

⁶ Durkin, Paul K Lieutenant Colonel(USMC), pg 1.

⁷ McCahill, William Col(USMCR), Pg 24.

train is reduced from 365 days to approximately 38 days (304 hours) or one-tenth the scheduled amount of time to complete required annual training.⁸ Annual requirements include the following: marksmanship, physical fitness, NBC defense training, hazing/sexual harassment, STD/HIV injury prevention, nutrition education, stress management, hypertension education and control, leadership, alcohol and substance abuse prevention and control, suicide awareness, tobacco use and cessation, and martial arts training. In addition to completing the above-mentioned mandatory training requirements during their drill weekends, reserve officers must also complete their Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) training. Despite the active duty and reserve officers initially having same career paths, it is unreasonable to expect reserve officers to exhibit the same levels of proficiency as their active duty counterparts given this abbreviated training schedule. If key billets like the Commanding Officer, CO, and the Operations Officers,S-3, were assigned to active duty officers this would improve force readiness of the unit, because the active duty officers have more time to complete their training throughout the year and could concentrate on training reservist during a reservist drill weekend.

⁸ Per the MCOs/directives of mandatory training for an officer adds up to 439 hours of training per year.

Another contribution to the deficiencies in reserve officers' training is that most reserve officers do not serve in billets within their MOSs.⁹ In most situations, enlisted reservist serving in billets outside their MOS can be sent back to school for additional MOS training; however, this additional training opportunity is usually not available for reserve officers. Most MOS schools for officers require more than the allocated two weeks reserve annual training period. Technical MOS knowledge is vital to making timely informed decisions. For example, when Marine Wing Support Squadron (MWSS) 473 was activated in OIF, there were only three out of eleven officers trained in their billet's MOS. The only officers serving in their trained MOS's were the military police officer and the bulk fuel chief warrant officer 4. The key billet holders were MOS "mismatches": the CO was a supply officer serving in a engineer/logistics officer billet, the XO was an infantry officer serving in an aviation officer billet, the S-3 was an artillery officer serving in a logistics/engineer officer billet, the S-4 was a harrier pilot serving in a logistics officer billet, and the S-6 was a F/A 18 pilot serving in a communication officer billet.¹⁰ These key billet holders were expected to make sound decisions based on their experience and

⁹ The author was a former I&I and experienced these and other incidents. These incidents were not localized at her command. Talking with other I&I's, company and battalion level, similar incidents occurred.

¹⁰ The author was a former I&I for MWSS 473.

knowledge in their MOS; however, these officers had little or no experience with an MWSS except for drill weekends.

Consequently, during OIF, active duty units working with reserve units relied heavily on the I&Is because the active duty units were more confident in the I&Is abilities than those of the inexperienced, untrained reserve officers. If active duty officers were assigned to key billets within the reserve unit, the active duty officers would be in billets within his/her MOS, this would insure the unit has "duty experts".

EDUCATION DEFICIENCIES

Another area in which reserve officers lack parity with their active duty officer counterparts is professional military education. In addition to the required annual training and MOS training, which have already filled up the reserve officers' "bag," reserve officers must also find time for professional military education. Completion of professional military education is not emphasized as much for reserve officers as for active duty officers. A disparity between reserve and active duty officers exists in terms of PME requirements for promotion. PME is essential for promotion for an active duty officer; however, it is not for a reserve officer. Instead reserve officers receive "points" towards retirement when they finish their PME. However, these "points" are not needed for retirement or even promotion; the points simply allow the reserve officer

to retire sooner. As seen in the FY 2006 promotions for major and lieutenant colonel, 78% of the active duty captains and only 9% of the reserve captains selected completed the career level course.¹¹ The FY 2006 lieutenant colonel board reflected similar results: 93% of the active duty majors and 31% of the reserve major selected to lieutenant colonel complete intermediate level school.¹² The Marine Corps seems to hold the active duty to a higher standard for promotion and command. Of the seventeen field grade officers at 6th ESB who went to OIF only three of them were "PME complete." Of those three, two were on the I&I staff. Furthermore, three out of the four majors selected to lieutenant colonel at 6th ESB did not complete their PME.¹³ The Marine Corps will activate these reserve field grade officers to lead Marines into combat, but it will not promote its active duty field grade officers who did not complete their PME.

LEADERSHIP

In order to lead a unit effectively, a commander needs a combination of knowledge, skills, and abilities. The knowledge

¹¹ United States Marine Corps. "FY 2006 Major and Lieutenant Colonel selection board statistics" 28 December 2004 <https://lnweb1.manpower.usmc.mil/manpower/mm/MMPR/mmpr1_boards.nsf>

¹²United States Marine Corps. "FY 2006 Major and Lieutenant Colonel selection board statistics" 28 December 2004 https://lnweb1.manpower.usmc.mil/manpower/mm/MMPR/mmpr1_boards.nsf

¹³Conversation with Maj Hook who was and I&I and served as the Operations Officer for 6th ESB during OIF.

and experience level for most reserve officers is limited to their four to five years on active duty and one weekend a month and two weeks a year. This amount of time is insufficient for a reserve officer to gain the valuable experience and knowledge of the "day to day" requirements of command and training. Yet, when a SMCR unit is activated, reserve commanders are expected to perform with the knowledge and experience equivalent to that of an active duty commander.

The danger of inexperienced leadership was demonstrated during a MWSS 473's field exercise. The Marines had been in the field for two weeks and had just completed a Forward Air Refueling Point (FARP) at 0300. The next FARP was scheduled for two days later. In the interim, the Marines went back to the rear for a day of overnight liberty. During the FARP Officer In Charge's (OIC) confirmation brief to the CO, the S-3A (I&I officer) suggested the Marines should get at least six hours of sleep before they drove back to the rear, a three hour drive on a 7-ton truck. When the Marines finally departed a mere three hours after the completion of the FARP, they had not received a safety brief nor a convoy brief by the reserve FARP OIC and the truck was overloaded with 28 Marines.¹⁴ During the 7-ton's hasty trip to the rear, the truck hit rail road crossing guards

¹⁴ USMC authorizes only 15-20 Marines in the back of a 7-ton truck on a highway for safety reasons.

because the driver was going too fast to stop for the oncoming train. The same driver was also caught speeding on the highway by the Marine Corps Air Station road master. If the reserve officer had given a safety and convoy brief, he would have emphasized safety issues which might have prevented the truck's near miss with the train. In addition, he should have conducted some type of accountability check. This check would serve two important purposes: (1) it would have alerted someone that there were too many Marines in the back of the 7 ton truck and (2) it would have maintained an accurate accountability of all Marines coming and going from the FARP site.

Another leadership deficiency is that reserve officers reflect a philosophy, "Do as I say, but not as I'm doing." ¹⁵ This philosophy is epitomized when all hands are required to muster at 0700, and the reserve officers would not show up until 0800 or sometimes even later. By not conforming to the rest of the unit's muster time, the reserve officers present a poor example for the junior Marines to follow. This is a distinct lack of professionalism and can be attributed to poor mentorship and shortage of experience.

RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

¹⁵The author was a former I&I and experienced these and other incidents. These incidents were not localized at her command. Talking with other I&I's, company and battalion level, similar incidents occurred.

The Reserve Marines bring many different skills and ideas to the Marine Corps which make them a vital asset to the Marine Corps. However, the Marine Corps must recognize their limitations and should place active duty I&I officers in the key billets in order to maintain, train, lead and protect our vital asset. First, active duty officers are not challenged by time constraints, they are able to receive all their annual training requirements as well as improve their MOS skills 365 days a year. Furthermore, very rarely are active duty officers placed in billets for which they are not MOS trained. This 360 degree training and billet compatibility gives the active duty officers an up-to-date perspective and ability to make more informed decisions. Second, active duty officers are required to complete PME for promotion. This requirement drives an active duty officer to become educated in MAGTF operations and once again, gives that officer a realistic perspective which a reserve officer is not required to have. Lastly, active duty officers are leaders of Marines 24 hours a day, 365 days a year; not one weekend a month two weeks a year. Leadership is an intangible concept, and in order to develop leadership, an officer must have the time and opportunity to develop their skills. In conclusion, the active duty I&I brings a wealth of knowledge, expertise and experience that would provide the type of professional environment that will guarantee our reserve

force is trained and ready to augment the active duty when called upon in time of war or national emergency.

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